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PSEUDO-GOTHIC IVORIES IN THE HEARN
COLLECTION

WERE it not for the fact that one of the ivories of the former Hearn Collection achieved publication in the last issue of the *JOURNAL* (pp. 428-433), this note would probably have never seen the light, but in view of the erroneous conclusions which might be drawn from such monuments when they are given character by publication, it may be useful to point out the dubious authenticity of this and other ivories in the collection which purport to be mediaeval originals.

I am sure that enough evidence was produced by the writer who published the ivory (Fig. 1) to convince most students of



FIGURE 1.—TRIPTYCH FROM THE HEARN COLLECTION: PROVIDENCE.

mediaeval art that it was not done in the Middle Ages. It was pointed out, for instance, that the reliefs were very unintelligent imitations of two well-known monuments of different dates,—the tympanum of the Virgin Portal of Notre Dame at Paris, and the choir reliefs of the same cathedral. I say unintelligent imitations, because the iconography is confused in a manner inconceivable on the part of a mediaeval copyist, who would scarcely have omitted two of the figures in the Appearance to the

Holy Women, or reduced the apostles to five in the Resurrection of the Virgin. And it is quite too much to ask us to suppose that a Gothic artist of the fourteenth century would have turned an Incoronata into God the Father, and would have added a beard to a candelabrum-bearing angel!

The ivory is suspicious on its face for the awkward *faire* of the architectural detail, the superficial incision of the draperies, the squat proportions of the figures, and the air of niggling hesitancy which pervades it as a whole. Something of the same unconvincing style and iconography can be found in its companion piece in the sale (No. 13 of the catalogue of 1908; No. 1002 of the sale catalogue), where we have a pair of Magi added to an already



FIGURE 2.—IVORY DIPTYCH: HEARN COLLECTION.

complete Epiphany in the central panel, and a wholly un-Gothic figure in the boy with a lamb in the lower panel of the right wing.

The ivory published in the *JOURNAL* is not the only one to copy well-known monuments. One or two of these imitations are noted in the catalogues, such as the "reduction" of the ivory panel in the British Museum representing the "Apotheosis of Marcus Aurelius" (Cat. 1908, No. 1; sale cat., No. 892). There is a very attractive, but hardly mediaeval, replica of one of the Virtues on Strassburg cathedral in the statuette listed as No. 924 in the sale catalogue (Cat. 1908, No. 34). The most amusing pasticcio in the collection is perhaps the diptych (Fig. 2; Cat. 1908, No. 14; sale cat., No. 1046), in which a complicated frame of no consistent style incloses four scenes, one of them a *Noli Me Tangere* with the Dove (!) descending from above, another an imitation of some Franco-Flemish Annunciation, and still

another an abbreviation to three figures of no less a composition than Raphael's Transfiguration. The diptych is ascribed in the catalogue to the fourteenth century!

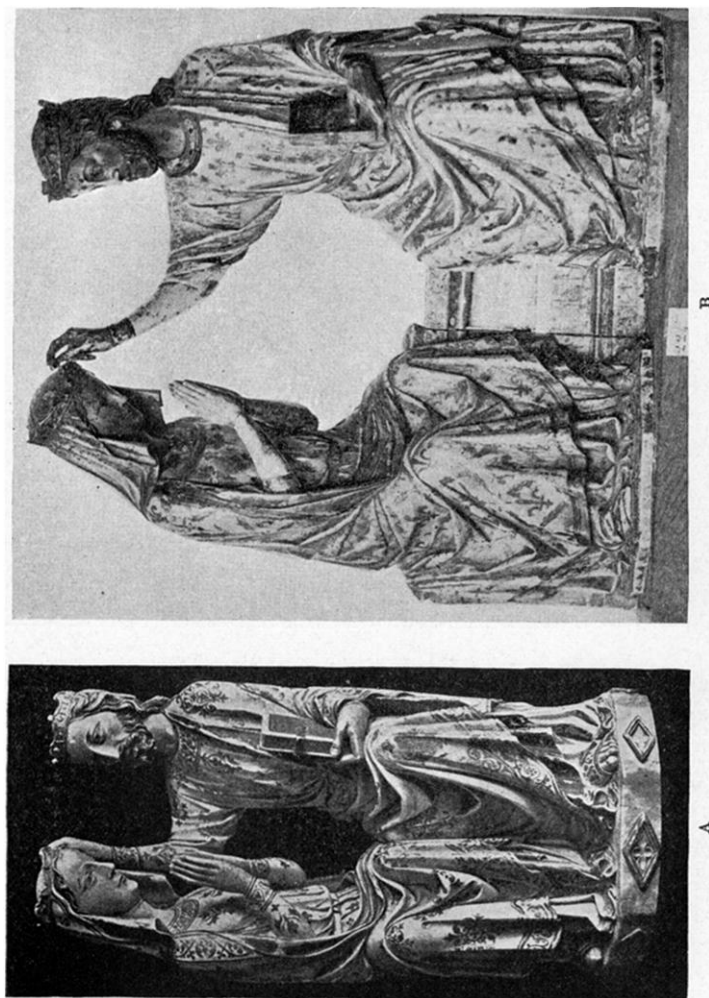


FIGURE 3.—CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN: A, HEARN COLLECTION; B, LOUVRE.

Several pièces in the collection may I think be ascribed to a single modern carver, who is perhaps the worst sculptor that ever desecrated ivory. He was a copyist pure and simple, and worked mainly in the Louvre and the Trocadéro, to judge from his models. His "Coronation of the Virgin" (Fig. 3, A; Cat. 1908,

No. 29b; sale cat., No. 953) reduces to a single piece the well-known ivory figures of the Louvre (Fig. 3, B), and purports to be of the "thirteenth century."

Suspicion is aroused at once by the unusual preservation of the color in the ornaments on the robes, and this impression is not remedied by the evident lack



A



B

FIGURE 4.—VIRGIN AND CHILD: A, HEARN COLLECTION; B, VILLENEUVE-LÈS-AVIGNON.

of ease with which the workman tries to adapt his group to the dimensions of his block, or by the awkward postures and the impossible proportions. The same hand is evidently responsible for the imitation (Fig. 4, A Cat. 1908, No. 29a; sale cat.,

No. 952) of the beautiful Virgin of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon (Fig. 4, B) which Molinier dates toward the end of the thirteenth century.¹ Its style is far more developed than that of the Louvre Coronation, but our copyist reflects little trace of the difference, mishandling the graceful rhythm of the later figure



FIGURE 5.—VIRGIN AND CHILD: A, HEARN COLLECTION; B, CHARTREUSE DE CHAMPMOL.

with the same *raideur* which marks his imitation of the Coronation, with whose Romanesque stiffness his own limitations have a faraway affinity. But he is no blind worshipper of the High Gothic; we find him next attacking a work of a hundred years later (Fig. 5, A; Cat. 1908, No. 29, c; sale cat., No. 996), and confining to his block in the same awkward manner the ample

¹Molinier: *Hist. des Arts appliqués: Ivoires*, p. 187.

proportions of Jean de Marville's Madonna which stands over the portal of the Chartreuse de Champmol at Dijon (Fig. 5, B). To her he gives again the slit eyes, long neck, and sharp features which belong to the thirteenth century, and retains in the Child the stiffness with which he rendered Him in the copy of the Virgin of Villeneuve. One needs but to compare the lower profile and the creased neck of the Virgins in all three of his productions to see that the same hand is responsible for the ugliness of the head in every case. The Madonna of Dijon is dated in the closing years of the fourteenth century; if our sculptor were a real Gothic artist, he could have worked no earlier than 1400. Can one believe that an artist of the fifteenth century executed the Hearn Coronation and the copy of the Virgin of Villeneuve? The one essential feature of his style, if style it can be called, is timidity of handling; if we assume that he is a mediaeval workman, this characteristic would point to the thirteenth century, rather than a later date.

The reader will probably find such considerations rather academic, for one attributes with difficulty to a fifteenth century hand such impartial copying as this. It is quite in character with a modern imitator, however, and I think that our sculptor went even further afield in his search for models, since it seems to me very likely that we can hold him responsible for that awful parody on Bernini which appeared in the sale as "Apollo and Daphne" (Fig. 6; Cat. 1908, No. 155; sale cat., No. 847), and possibly also for the "Diana and Bacchus" (Cat. 1908, No. 165; sale cat., No. 1063).

I hesitate somewhat to add to the *œuvre* of our dubious genius the imposing polyptych (Fig. 7, A) figured in the sale catalogue



FIGURE 6.—APOLLO AND DAPHNE: HEARN COLLECTION.

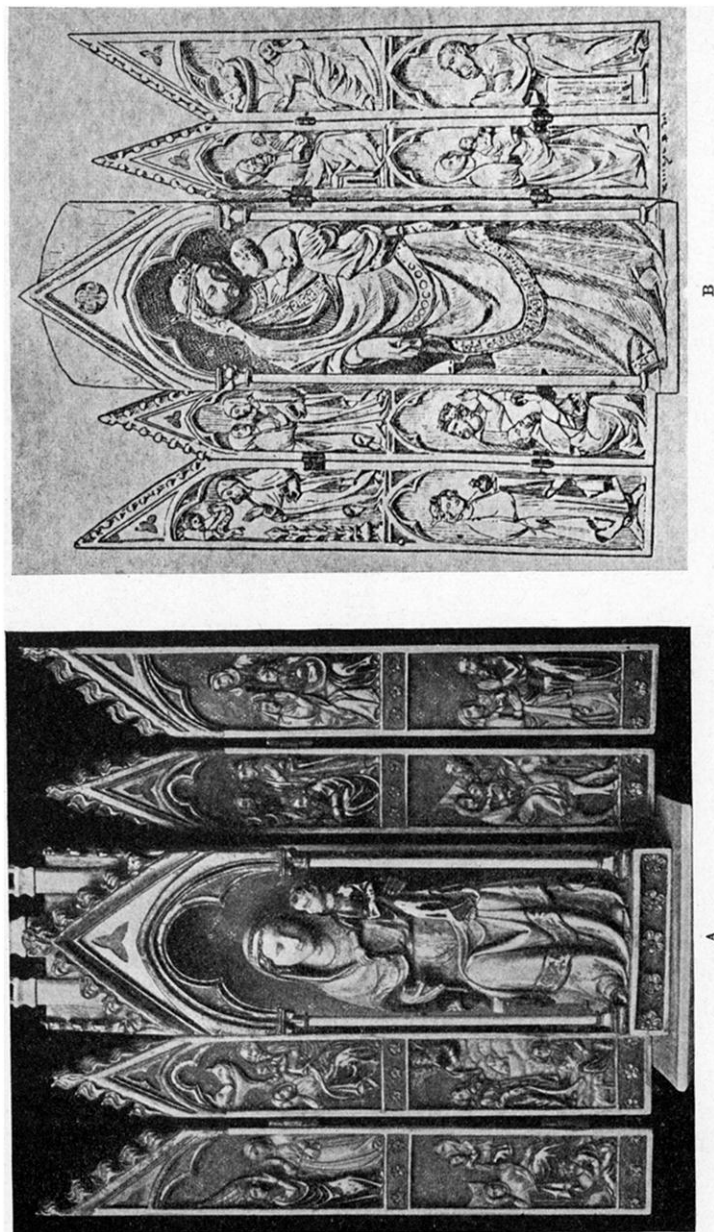


FIGURE 7.—IVORY POLYPTYCH: A, HEARN COLLECTION; B, LOUVRE.

as No. 959 (Cat. 1908, No. 53), partly because I have not seen the original, which may bely the poor reproduction given in the catalogue, and partly because the general appearance of the polyptych is fairly good. But even from the reproduction one gets a distinct impression that the Child in the central panel is a replica of that in the copy of the Villeneuve Virgin; the pose of head, body, legs, and foot is almost exactly the same in each case, and the same formula is followed for the drapery. Similar folds are found in the lower drapery of both Madonnas, and the Virgin of the triptych seems to have the creased throat that appears as a mannerism of our copyist when he is engaged with Gothic models. Otherwise the polyptych seems to be drawn largely from a well-known example of the fourteenth century in the Louvre (Fig. 7, B)¹. From

this our carver has taken four panels and reduced them to two, thus achieving a very crowded Nativity in the upper right panel of the left wing, and a similarly awkward Presentation in the lower right panel of the right wing. Left to his own resources in the other panels, he becomes quite un-Gothic in his iconography;



FIGURE 8.—PEDESTAL OF POLYPTYCH,
FIGURE 7, A.

in the left upper panel of the right wing the second Magus is uncrowned and does not conform in pose and gesture with the usual type, which requires that he should turn his face in profile to the Magus behind him, and that his arm should cross his body with the hand pointing upward. In the panel next to the right, what was apparently meant for a Coronation of the Virgin is upset by the introduction of a female figure. Elsewhere the subjects are incoherent, as in the two lower panels of the left wing. Lastly, assuming that the base (Fig. 8) belongs to the polyptych, the artist has used in the Pietà which adorns it a type that is a hundred years later than his style.

I shall leave to others better versed than I in this regard the question of the paintings on the back of this polyptych. It

¹*Musée du Louvre: Cat. des Ivoires* (Molinier), No. 66.

would be interesting, but hardly profitable, to investigate the other doubtful-looking ivories of the mediaeval section; as I have had to deal only with reproductions, and these other pieces are not so patently imitations, it has seemed best to limit this note to the ivories discussed above.

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